THE PRICE

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A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anastasia Odatzidou was born in 1982 in Egaleo, Attica. She is married and the mother of 3 children. She studied Chemical Engineering at the National Technical University of Athens and works as a private employee. In addition, she is an accredited Coach and works with people who wish to get the most out of themselves and their lives.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

If there is a purpose in man's life, then it cannot be outside of man and in things that do not depend on him. If there is a purpose in man's life, then it will certainly be permanent. What, then, is more tied to man than himself?

A collection of three short stories. The first and longest story concerns three scientists who build a Cyborg
and they dream of their creation gaining free will. The second, just one page long, concerns the walk of a presence with superior power to man. While the third, also short, takes place somewhere in Africa.

Being yourself comes at a price, and part of my price is in this book. Being yourself in a world of alienation is hard, but maybe it's worth the price.

Just as it is difficult to find happiness. It is said that happiness lies within us. However, when someone finds happiness within themselves, perhaps they should take care to bring it a little outside of themselves, desiring it in terms of social justice.

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THE ARTIFICIAL WILL OF FREE INTELLIGENCE

1. THE HEROES

The Great was now a fact. A team of three scientists had achieved what the entire scientific community had been working furiously to achieve, the construction of the first cyborg.
The use of 3D printing had paved the way a decade ago. The entire human body could be produced in a week, while 24 hours was enough to produce the human nervous system.

The last obstacle was the way the artificial brain would communicate with living cells. The recent invention of artificial synapses had provided the solution. Artificial intelligence had managed to be smarter than humanity for a long time. Both because artificial intelligence had evolved tremendously, and because humans had stopped processing data and understanding in depth. The property of human
of primary thought had been lost.

Its three creators wanted to lead Mega into the realm of genius. Until now, robots have only been used in positions of limited responsibility. So they had to give it free will. Free will to act beyond the reality of the data. Geniuses exist beyond common sense and envision where no one dares. Mega should use his vast source of knowledge to open new paths and not stay in the safety zone. Thus, he could become the risky surgeon who saves lives, he could become the inspired manager who selects human resources and leads his team to the top.

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The Big One was 1.98m tall and had the body of a stocky young man. He was blond with blue eyes. His voice was deep. His makers had modeled him after Patrick Smile, the
male model of the year. This cyborg was close to perfection. In addition to its impeccable external features, it also had the most advanced data processor and the largest memory capacity. The Megas had the best performance in creating personalized experiences for the consumer audience, while proposing the most effective solutions in business matters. However, this was not enough for the Yangs
Lee, Natasha and John.

Yang Li was only nineteen years old, a child prodigy from Japan. By the age of sixteen he was the most sought-after programmer with a PhD in “Search Engines and Creative Solutions”. While, Natasha was a well-dressed Russian twenty-eight year old Chemical Engineer with a PhD in new silicon materials. Natasha was the inventor of artificial synapses. Finally, thirty-five year old John was of Greek origin, a renowned neuroscientist with a PhD in Meta-Learning. Together the three had created the Mega.

Three such different personalities that Mr. Dalton's sharp eye had brought them together. Mr. Dalton was the American owner of the most successful research company in Silicon Valley. All three of them had a wealth of proposals, but Mr. Dalton's keen negotiating skills left them no room to refuse his offer.

No one could resist this tough and clever businessman who could hardly miss anything, as he was the overseer of everything. So, with great difficulty, John and the other two had kept their attempt to create the Great One with free will a secret.

2. THE DIFFICULTY OF IMPLEMENTING AN IDEA

It was a nice idea. What could make a machine fully human? Only free will. Everything else was already there. All the other human qualities were already at the disposal of the

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Robots. Beauty, strength, intelligence, problem solving, evolution, even emotions.

The transcendence of artificial intelligence is its ability to do things it is not programmed to do. Its transcendence is none other than choosing the right decision when all the data converges on the wrong one. This is only
Genius people can do it. So that's what the Great One had to do. He was already perfect. He had to become transcendental.

But what drives you to act beyond programming? How do you go beyond the conventional solutions that data suggests? How is free will created? What gives you the strength to follow something that is beyond logic? These are the difficult questions that the creators of Mega had to answer.

After much research, John, Yang Li, and Natasha came up with three parameters. Imagination, faith, and love are at the core of free will. They decided to start their efforts with imagination because they couldn't agree on what faith was true, and they knew little about love, as they never found the time or inclination to fall in love.

3. IMAGINATION

Imagination is the ability to form images that transcend reality and that which distinguishes man from all other forms of life on this planet, even. Imagination creates new life and new minds. The first organized form of imagination is mythology, and the entire edifice of art is founded upon it.

The Great One had to come into contact with art in order to cultivate his imagination. The first work that was decided to be placed in the workshop was Leonardo Da Vinci's Mona Lisa. An enigmatic portrait. A large painting, a faithful copy, was placed in the workshop at dawn and waited for the Great One to look at it.

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Megas had a heavy and completely controlled schedule, as Mr. Dalton had taken care of it. Megas would enter a program of intense activity at five in the morning. His breakfast consisted of seasonal fruit, boiled eggs and a protein drink with plant-based milk. Then, he would exercise for an hour and after getting ready, he would go to the laboratory at eight. In the laboratory, he would find his creators, who would take care of his improvement and socialization, while also carrying out the necessary checks.

In addition, the laboratory also had a central computer, to which Megas connected so that cookies could be downloaded for his training. With these cookies, he could derive information about human behavior and better plan his actions.

At the back of the laboratory there was a specially designed living room, with a small table, 4 bar-style chairs and a sofa with lots of cushions for John, Natasha and Yang to sit on to eat and drink coffee, while giving a homely feel. The painting was placed in this living room.

4. THE MONACO

It was almost eight o'clock when Megas entered the laboratory. The classic daily check of his reflexes and physical condition followed, while an electronic upgrade was also carried out. During the break, Megas headed to the living room where Natasha was also sitting, drinking her coffee. There he saw the painting. He had never seen a work of art up close before, only in virtual reality, although essentially everything was virtual reality for him. He did not know this particular painting.

"What is this painting?" asked the Great One.

- This is the portrait of Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci. It is a very famous work that has occupied art experts for many years.

- Why?

- Because they want to understand whether Mona Lisa is smiling or not.

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"And why should they understand?" he asked again, as he was programmed to be curious.

- Because we can't not know. We can't bear not knowing. This woman must be feeling something and we want to know what it is. She is a woman who passed into eternity with this portrait. So we must get to know her in depth, because she exists and will exist much longer than us. So she has no right to keep this mystery. - And what does she do?

"We don't know. I, however, believe that he is smiling. What do you say?" asked Natasha, anxiously awaiting the answer.
of.

- What am I saying about what?

- Is he smiling or not?

"What am I talking about?" he asked her again, more slowly this time.

"Looking at the painting, what is your conclusion, regarding her facial expression?" she asked him as explanatoryly as she could, as she understood that his programming did not respond to her previous question.

- Based on the mapped expressions of the human face and the shading of the painting, the chances of him smiling are 70%.

- Great. What do you think he's doing?

- Please, what do you mean by the word "believe"? Repeat it. inquiry.

- If you had to decide whether he is smiling or not, what would you say?

- I would say he's probably smiling.

- What if I told you that he definitely isn't smiling and there's no chance he is?

- I would say that he is probably smiling and you are wrong, replied the Great one coldly.

- And if you were wrong? Can you say that he doesn't smile 100%?

- You're wrong. Odds are he's smiling.

- You can say that beyond the facts, the Mona Lisa is not Is he smiling?

- No.

"What do you think?" Natasha asked him again.

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- I believe that...

The Great One collapsed on the couch. His system rebooted. His speech program was unresponsive. Natasha and Yang Li became anxious. Many thoughts were pressing on their minds and their heads felt ready to burst. A million-dollar program might have been ruined. Their careers would be over. Mr. Dalton would see to it. No one would hire them again. So many years of hard work, so many sleepless nights, so much pain and fatigue wasted. All the scientists would laugh at them. Everyone who had admired them until now.

The only one who managed to remain calm was John. He followed the protocol for reinstalling the speech program, and after half an hour the Great One was exactly as before. John knew that the free will project was difficult. He had not let himself be fooled by dreams of the fleeting glory that would come from achieving this goal. But he had not said anything about it to the others, as he knew that would discourage them. He preferred to talk constantly about the recognition that awaited them. John often made sure to inflate the minds of Natasha and Yang Li so that they would not back down. It was a difficult project, and the fear of Mr. Dalton made it even more difficult.

5. THE FEAR OF NEW ATTEMPTS

After the Great One was restored, there was silence for a long time. The Great One was taken to the dormitory and put on low activity until dawn. Yang Li and Natasha were quite upset. John was calm and thought about how to handle the situation to keep his colleagues committed to the free will project.

Yang Li, who could no longer hold back, began to shout in anger. Natasha motioned for him to stop, pointing towards Mr. Dalton's office. Yang Li approached her.

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"We almost ruined our efforts," he said, clearly irritated, but in a low voice.

- I was so afraid that we wouldn't be able to restore the speech system, Natasha admitted with a feeling of guilt.

- What did you tell him?

- As we agreed, Yang Li.

- Did you tell him anything else?

- No. What we agreed on.

"I don't think we should try again," said the Yang Li..

- Probably. Let Mr. Dalton not understand anything, agreed Natasha, who had not spoken at all until then.

John stood up and approached them.

"Did you think we would manage it right away?" he asked them, without waiting for an answer.

- When did we succeed with the first one? John continued. - That's true, Natasha replied.

- And yet look at him! We accomplished the most difficult task. And we can go even further. We have never been stopped by difficulties to stop now. Let's assess the situation soberly. Let's find the problem and the solution. We failed, but we learned something good for next time. It was never easy. But we are also for the difficult.

- Maybe. Yang Li replied thoughtfully.

- It wasn't easy, really, Natasha replied.

- So tell me, shall we continue?

- With many doubts, but inside, Natasha answered.

- I'm not sure. I want to think about it. I'll answer you tomorrow, John.

- Okay, then, tomorrow then. Good night!

It had been a tiring day. Everyone wanted some rest and relaxation. They headed to their dormitories to discuss their thoughts. Natasha and Yang Li were quite anxious. John was calm. Calm, as he had known from the beginning the difficulty of the situation and was ready for the consequences of his actions. He knew that after Natasha agreed to

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continue, Yang Li was an easy matter. He was sure that Yang Li would agree to continue tomorrow on the sole condition that he would undertake the second mission. Yang Li was like any other young man. He believed that everything was possible, even the most improbable, but it was only possible for him and not for the others.

6. THE SECOND MISSION

The next day, the three of them met at dawn in the laboratory, as they had a pending discussion that they wanted to complete before the Great One arrived.

"Good morning, how are you today?" John asked.

- Good morning! Quite hesitant. I'm waiting to hear your answer, Yang Li.
- Good morning! I thought about it a lot last night. In fact, I slept very little while thinking about it. I think what we are trying to do is possible, although difficult. However, it requires delicate handling. I would like to take on the second attempt. Do you agree?
- Of course, John replied.
- Yes, Natasha replied monotonously, feeling quite offended, but for the good of the group, she decided not to say anything and to drive away her negative energy with positive thoughts.

They continued working normally. Later, the Great One also came. Everything was going as usual. After the end of the inspection by the Great One and his departure, they sat down to find the new plan together. The second work they would put in the living room would be by Dali, and Yang Li would discuss it with the Great One.

7. THE SENSATIONAL BULLFIGHTER

Two days after the agreement for the second attempt, the Hallucinogenic Bullfighter was placed in the living room and waited for the Great. Yang Li was also waiting for the Great, confident of his success, as he had always been the child prodigy who never failed. The unwavering self-confidence with the inexperience

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The experiences of his youth were the causes of his arrogance. An arrogance that is crushed only by the great disappointments of life that can even lead to madness.

The Great One arrived and found his three creators working peacefully as usual. The daily tests and required upgrades were carried out. Break time arrived. John and Natasha excused themselves that they had some pending work to complete and would be going to the living room in five minutes. So, Yang Li and the Great One set off for the living room.

"What is this?" asked the Great One as they approached the living room.

- Ah! it's our new painting. The Hallucinogen Dali's Bullfighter.
- What happened to the previous painting?
- It was a bit dull and old-fashioned. This one is more modern and adds color. How do you like it?
- What do you mean?
- How would you describe him?
- It is a painting of many colors with several themes but without coherence between them. It is a painting in a surrealist style.

- Do you see the bullfighter?
- Which bullfighter?
- The painting has a bullfighter painted on it. Do you see him?
- Where is it?
- The bust of the second Venus from the right is his face and the green shadow on her gown is his tie. On the left is the sparkling "suit of lights", which becomes one with the rocks, which you can see like the head of the dying bull. - I don't see him.

- But, how? Look here, said Yang Li, approaching the painting and pointing out exactly what he had said before.
- I don't see him. I see Aphrodite, the rocks and the lights.
- Well, said Yang Li disappointedly, as he understood that the Mega's programming did not let him choose

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fragmentary data from the table and give two different interpretations to the same object.

- What do you say? asked John, who had just arrived in the living room and recognized the disappointment on Young Lee's face.

- For the painting, Yang Li replied.
- How do you like it, Mega?
- As it is, replied the Great One.
- Which of the two do you like more?
- Which two, John?
- Who do you like more, the Gioconda or the Hallucinogenic Bullfighter?
- What do you mean "I like it"?
- Which one of the two would you like to have in the living room?
- I'm sorry, John, I don't have an answer.
- Come on, choose one, said Natasha.
- I'm sorry, I don't have an answer.
- Make an effort, Mega, Natasha said again.
- I have no answer, the Great One said again, collapsing.

This time they didn't worry, as they knew exactly how to get him back. However, Yang Li was quite upset with Natasha and spoke very badly to her. John calmed things down. Natasha went to her dormitory very upset, without defending herself, because she thought that she was right that Yang Li was upset with her. She had ruined things by insisting.

John, on the other hand, thought that Natasha had been right to insist. However, he did not defend her. At some point, Natasha had to defend herself. She was an adult now and she had to start to understand. John preferred the middle ground for the good of the group, avoiding conflict with Yang Li.

The collapse of the Mega was not the real reason for Yang Li's outburst at Natasha. After all, the possibility of another collapse had been accepted as a possibility when they had discussed the second attempt. Yang Li attacked Natasha because he could not accept his failure and needed somewhere to vent. The guilty Natasha was the ideal

victim.

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8. THE THIRD ATTEMPT

It had been about three days since the second attempt, and all the tests showed that no new neurons had been created, proving that Megas had been affected in any way. After the day's tests were completed and Megas returned to his dormitory, John decided to open the discussion about a new attempt. They were all sitting in the living room, ready to share their ideas, when Mr. Dalton entered. Everyone was agitated.

"Good evening! I knew I would find you here," he said in his always arrogant tone.

- Good evening!, all three replied at the same time. - How are you?
- Very well, replied John, who was calmer.
- I saw Megas the day before yesterday at the gym. Every time he seems like a genius to me. You are doing a great job and I think it's time to introduce Megas.

"When are you talking about?" Natasha asked, quite surprised.

- I'm leaving tomorrow for the Ecologists' conference and I'll be back in six days. I'll arrange it for then. I'm sure that's enough time for you to prepare.
- Of course, replied Yang Li, as he always wanted to give the feeling that he had everything under control.
- Ugh! These environmentalists do the same thing every year! They will again dazzle us about digital waste and the increase in digital data and their concerns... But as a businessman with respect for Sustainable Development, I have to go, he said, laughing playfully, as he left.

The door behind him slammed shut. Young Lee and John They remained thoughtful. Natasha, quite worried, asked:

- What are we going to do now?
- What do you want us to do! Yang Li replied ironically. This tone of Yang Li forced Natasha not to speak again.
- The Great One is ready for the presentation. The question is whether we will continue with the third attempt before the

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presentation. I think we should continue, said John.

- I disagree, John, said Yang Li.
- Why do you disagree?
- I think we shouldn't jeopardize the presentation.
- How can we jeopardize the presentation?
- I mean, John, what if the Great One collapses again?
- If it collapses, we'll bring it back.
- And if we don't have time?
- Then, we must ensure we have, Yang Li.
- But, what, the presentation is in six days! -
So we need to implement a new plan immediately.
- We don't have time, said Yang Li.
- If we start the day after tomorrow, we have.
- John, I think you don't understand the situation.
- I understand completely, I assure you, Yang Li. Today we will think of ideas and tomorrow we will discuss them and decide. If the efforts fail, we have several days to fix the problems. In the past, it only took a few hours to restore the Great One, without causing any further damage. The presentation is our opportunity to show the Great One as we dreamed him, and we dreamed him perfect and superior, with free will. Unless, of course, the situation is not as I describe it. Unless there is something else that I do not understand. Is there something else that you are not saying?

- No, said Yang Li, not wanting to admit that something inside him was warning him to be afraid of this presentation.

- Do you, Natasha, agree?
- Yes, let's move on. -
Great! Let's go to our dorms to rest and think. We'll decide tomorrow afternoon, John said.

9. GONE WITH THE WIND

The evening passed quickly, as did the hours leading up to the afternoon. They sat in the living room. All three were convinced that they needed to change their approach.

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- I think we need to change tactics, said Yang Li, always believing himself to be the most innovative and the smartest.

- I agree, said John.
- Absolutely. I think that's enough with the paintings, said Natasha.
- I believe we are done with fantasy too. I think we need to consider the choices of love or faith.

- I strongly disagree, John, with faith. Besides, we have discussed it thoroughly, especially about faith, and we always disagree. - You are right, Yang Li, and I think that with
such limited time, it is better to choose love, Natasha agreed.

- Okay, John replied displeasedly. - So, how do
we show love to the Great One? How do we make him understand? Yang Li asked.

They remained silent for a long time. They remained silent for a long time, because when you don't know how to talk about something, then it's better to remain silent. Natasha timidly peeked at John, since she felt a strong attraction for him, which kept her awake at night, daydreaming.

- My mother's favorite book was 'Gone with the Wind' by Margaret Mitchell. I remember her telling me that it was about a man who was very much in love with someone younger than him, who tried very hard and in the end left disappointed. But it was a stormy relationship. It was one of those loves that burns your insides and takes you beyond reason.

- Have you ever read it, Natasha?
- No, John.
- But, someone has to read it.
- I don't think we have time, John. - Then,
do you agree to take the risk of giving it to the Great One tomorrow to read, without one of us reading it first?

- Yes, Natasha and Yang Li answered.

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The risk was taken. The book was given to Megas and he read it, without showing any change in behavior. So John, Natasha, and Yang Li decided, despite their disappointment, to accept things as they came and work feverishly on the presentation.

10. THE PRESENTATION

The presentation lasted about three hours and all the guests were delighted with the Great One. Truly, the Great One was an extraordinary creation. A creation that filled Mr. Dalton with pride, who saw its prestige.
as a leader and pioneer to soar. No one else could compare to him. His company was the best in the world. Now it was time to start utilizing the Great One in various tasks.

"My dears, you were excellent! Thank you very much!" said Mr. Dalton, laughing with satisfaction.
- Everyone was amazed by the Great One, and the Yang Li.
- Yes, indeed. And I think, Natasha, that most people didn't expect artificial synapses to work so well, John also commented.

- Yes, yes, all excellent! I think now, my dears, that the time has come to utilize the Great One in various tasks. It is time, Great One, for you to show us your abilities.
"I could," replied the Great one coldly.
- Well, Mega, Dr. Gelshaw will need your help in studying the genes.
- Sounds interesting! Yang Li said before the Great One could speak.
- What exactly will I do? asked the Great
One. - She will tell you the details tomorrow. Please prepare him too because from the day after tomorrow he will join her team.

- Okay, said Natasha.
"What is Dr. Gelshaw's vision for her research?" asked John, who was not happy with this development.

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- Dr. Gelshaw envisions gene intervention in embryos during pregnancy. A very ambitious plan for humanity. - Indeed, John muttered.

- There is nothing else to say! Thank you all very much! Good luck! - Good luck!

He hadn't even taken two steps when he heard Megas say something that left him stunned.

- Excuse me, Mega, did you say something to me?
- Yes, I told you.
- Can you repeat that because I don't think I heard it. correctly.
- Yes, I said I don't want to participate in this research.
- How did you come up with this?
- It came to me as everything comes to me. I will not be joining Dr. Gelsow's team.
- You don't understand. It doesn't matter whether you want it or not. It's not a matter of choice, said Mr. Dalton.
- You're wrong. It's all about choices. - Can someone tell me what the hell is going on here? Mr. Dalton screamed.

No one answered. John, Natasha, and Yang Li stood speechless, looking at each other awkwardly. It seemed that the Great One had finally gained free will. The goal they had longed for, for which they had worked and risked, seemed to have been achieved. But they did not know whether they should rejoice.

- What do you mean, asked the Great One.
- Listen, Mega, tomorrow you will go to be informed about your new responsibilities. I have nothing else to discuss with you. Please, leave us now, because we want to discuss two things.

- I guess, Mr. Dalton, I wasn't clear. I won't go where you tell me.

- You will go because I decide for you. You will go.

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- God is my witness that I will not go! God is my witness that I will not do things I do not want to! I am not afraid of you. I decide for myself!
- Who do you think you are?
- I am who I am!
- Then you have to pay the price for being yourself, he said, taking a small pistol out of his back pocket and shooting Megas.

The Big fell to the ground. Natasha began to scream in panic. John ran to check on the Big. Young Lee stood still, all he could do was wish that all this hadn't really happened.

- Don't worry, he's just unconscious. He'll wake up fine tomorrow. Fine, of course, that's his way of saying it. John, you calm Natasha down and then take Mega to his dormitory. Yang Li, come quickly to my office and explain what happened! I'll be waiting for you both, said Mr. Dalton furiously.

Mr. Dalton knew that if anyone was going to tell him the whole truth, it was Yang Li, and he made a pact that the two of them would talk first. Natasha, after calming down, headed fearfully to Mr. Dalton's office, intending not to reveal anything of their secret efforts.

Natasha was disappointed to enter the office, as she had hoped John would have come too, but at least she was encouraged to see Mr. Dalton calm. Natasha quickly realized that Yang Li had already revealed everything.

- Natasha, Yang Li will inform you about what we said. I explained to him that you have a week to make the Great one useful again.
- I think it's quite useful.
- I don't think so, my dear Natasha. In a week we'll Let's say it again. You can go now.

Mr. Dalton, understanding Natasha's reluctance, rose to open the door and bid them farewell like a good host. As Natasha passed him, he grabbed her by the arm.

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and whispered in her ear his deep desire to visit her one day in her dormitory. Natasha felt her spirits sink. The door closed. Mr. Dalton was one of those
who knew how to build nuclear bombs and drop them on Hiroshima.

11. THE NON-EXISTENCE OF FREE WILL

When John went to Mr. Dalton's office, he found him alone and calm. Mr. Dalton welcomed him, knowing that he was the main instigator of the effort. He knew that threats would not work with John. John demanded respect and
Only with diligence could he achieve it.

- John, can you explain to me what happened? Yang Li told me some things, but I want you to explain it better.

- Mr. Dalton, the Great One is the most perfect artificial intelligence ever created. Only one thing separates him from being human, free will. I think he was worth the effort.

- And you succeeded, it seems.
- Yes.
- What you have accomplished is quite remarkable, but useless.

"What do you mean?" John asked, surprised.

- I don't blame you, John, for not understanding me, as you were not born to be a leader. All the great leaders of
world history one thing they desire and pursue, absolute obedience. And this in a construction so perfect you thought of destroying it. How did something like this come to you?
- Mr. Dalton, I don't think you understand what a great gift free will is. Man is not an electron passing through a slit.

- You probably never understood that free will is a fairy tale, a nice fairy tale for children to sleep in at night. There is no free will.

- You are wrong.
- You are wrong. How is there free will when no one decides where to be born?

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- He doesn't decide, really. But there is always a choice in what we were given.
- Really? What choice is there for someone who is born into famine or war? What choice is there for someone who is orphaned or whose parents are abusive?
- Has the choice to continue despite obstacles and go wherever his heart leads him.
- But, you admit it, and you don't understand it. There is no free will when your heart leads you because you haven't chosen your heart.
- What do you mean? You always have the choice to be yourself or No.
- But, when you don't choose to be who you were born to be, John, that self tortures you all your life like the stinkiest worm. Where did you find that worm? Who gave it to you since you didn't choose it? And so, when you finally understand that your self is the only way, all you have left to do is raise your hands and ask "Why me?" And if then, indeed, you have free will, you say no to yourself and you live with that worm rotting inside you, destroying everything that is there.

John stood motionless, looking at him.

- There is no free will, John, for anyone born without having accepted the life they will live, before they live it. In a week I want you to have made the Great one useful again. There is nothing more to be said. I would like you to leave now.

John stood up, his morale shattered. With all his beliefs shrouded in doubt. Who chose the life he lives? No one. Who would choose to be born into hunger, slavery, and torture instead of wealth, power, and glory! Who would prefer to be born a carpenter instead of a king! Could anyone have ever chosen their life in the first place? And what if we knew before we were born how we would live? What if we knew in advance the consequences of our actions? What made us accept a life of hardship? What convinced us that such a life is good? And what made us forget what we know? With these questions

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company arrived at the laboratory to meet Natasha and Yang Li.

12. GOD IS MY WITNESS

Yang Li and Natasha were sitting on the couch, waiting for John. Yang Li was quite upset and Natasha's incessant crying was weighing on his chest.

- Oh! It's been like this since we left Mr. Dalton's office, said Yang Li, hysterically raising his hands.

"Natasha, can you please stop?" he said softly, kneeling next to her. Natasha nodded yes.
- Do you understand what happened to the Great One? How did he gain free will? Yang Li asked.
- I don't know. I had the impression that the Third attempt, Natasha said.
- What was that about God? Did you talk to him?
- No, said Natasha.
- Me neither, said John.
- Did he find something on his own?
- I don't think so, Yang Li. The things the Great One reads they are very controlled.
- Then how, John?

"Did you read that in Gone with the Wind?" Yang Li asked, glaring menacingly at Natasha.
of.

"I don't know. I haven't read it," Natasha excused herself.
- Let's look it up, John said and searched the search engine. via his mobile phone.
- There! Yes, there! shouted Yang Li.
- Yes, there is this phrase in the book. "As God is my witness! They will not defeat me! I swear to survive and never starve again! Even if I have to steal or kill!", said John.

- But how is it that just one sentence is enough to change someone? he asked Natasha is frozen.
- It only takes a moment to change you, a thought, a realization. Change doesn't come bathed in light with

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drums marching beside her. Change comes humbly without waiting. In silence so that you don't understand and thus deprives you of the right to refuse, to turn back.

- It's your fault, idiot! Idiot! You brainless chicken, who are only with us because you invented the technical synapses, otherwise you would be unclaimed. Complex and useless! You are only capable of some invention. Nothing more, idiot! Yang Li rushed at Natasha, but John restrained him, while Natasha collapsed on the sofa, crying inconsolably.

- Stop it, you're tiring me out, Yang Li! Stop acting like you're not to blame for anything. You were here, with us, when we took the risk. When we said we'd try without knowing what the book said.

- But, I trusted Natasha.
- You trusted no one. You trust no one. You only care about success, glory. You don't accept for yourself that you can fail.

- You are unfair.
- No, I'm not being unfair. You're a hypocrite. I'm not judging you because I was young and I know what it's like. When you start taking your share of responsibility, then you'll start to mature. It's not your time yet, but the time will come when you'll understand what I'm telling you, John said with great affection.
- Sorry. Sorry, Natasha. I didn't expect all this to happen. I had imagined things differently the moment the Great One would gain free will. I had high expectations. And on the contrary, instead of being happy that we achieved the impossible, I wish we had never achieved it, Yang Li apologized.

- I don't hold any grudge against you, Yang Li. I feel the same way. Our only difference is that you take it out on others and I take it out on myself. We worked so hard for our own destruction...
- We have a week to bring back the Great One, said Yang Li, much calmer.

- But, I don't think we can take back his free will.

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- That won't be necessary, Natasha. Mr. Dalton explained to me, while you hadn't come to the office yet, that all we had to do was raise doubts in his mind.

"Mr. Dalton knows this well," John sneered.

"What do you mean, Yang Li?" asked Natasha, who didn't understand.

- We won't have to do much. Doubt will do everything for us. We don't have to tell him anything. We don't have to convince him. The thought that free will isn't worth it will convince him to give up on his own. He will leave free will alone as something heavy and useless.

- And how will this doubt arise in him?

- Simply, in the same way as we have worked so far. Using art and imagination. Tomorrow morning, Mr. Dalton will bring us the first painting,

Yang Li said, visibly happy and confident.

"What do you say, John?" Natasha asked.

- I don't know what I want. I need a 5-day break. I'll pack some of my things and come back in 5 days.

- But what does that leave us now that we need you the most?

- I can't help it, Yang Li.

- John, you have no right to leave.

- I'm leaving, Yang Li.

- So go away! Or rather, I'll go first. Don't let me hear this crying again!

13. SEX

When Natasha heard John say he was leaving, she started crying. Everything around her went dark. She didn't even notice Yang Li who left screaming, as he was in her world. Natasha was sitting on the couch with her hands wrapped around her face and crying inconsolably. John knelt next to her:

- Stop, Natasha, don't cry anymore, he said, pulling her her hands from her face.

She looked at him, still crying. She was crying for so many reasons. She was crying out of fear, but also out of love. She was crying because she was drowning. John sat down beside her, full of compassion, and

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She lay down on the couch, placing her head on his knees. He began to stroke her hair until she stopped crying.

- Yang Li is right. If I hadn't invented artificial synapses, I wouldn't be here. I'm doing everything wrong.
- If you hadn't invented artificial synapses, neither Yang Li nor I would be here. Neither of us. You need to stop doubting yourself. I'm sure that even when you say your name, a voice inside you wonders if you said it right.

- I'm tired. I don't want to do this anymore. I'm tired of hearing this voice inside me all the time. I can't be unworthy anymore. I don't want to apologize anymore.
- You will stop apologizing when you realize that you are, have, and do everything that other people do.

- Do you think so?
- Yes.

She began to cry again, more calmly and without despair. She cried like a baby who felt safe in its mother's arms, like someone who has found protection and peace after great suffering. John kissed her eyes and she remained still, not knowing how to react. He tenderly caressed her face and her hands. She did not move. Then, John bent down and kissed her lips. She did not move again even when he began to undress her. When she was completely naked, he pulled her and sat her on him. Then, surrendering, she began to respond to his kisses.

No one noticed Megas entering the lab. They were both blinded by excitement and so they didn't see Megas watching them curled up in a corner, not understanding how two bodies that were colliding so violently could look so pleased. John only noticed him after a long time and after Natasha had fallen asleep. He put on his clothes, covered Natasha with the sofa throw and approached him.

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14. GOD'S QUESTION

None of them intended to talk about what had happened before.
respect to Natasha. John sat next to him on the floor.

- How are you, Mega?
- I don't know, John.
- I feel something I can't explain. I feel an emptiness, without being able to explain exactly what emptiness is. I search through all the words I know and I can't find the right ones. On the other hand, I feel very full, without knowing why. - Welcome to the world of people!

- What did you say?
- Mega, you were made to be the most perfect humanoid. However, we three of your creators dreamed of something more for you. We wanted you to gain free will and it seems we have succeeded. I don't know how, but you now have free will. You are not defined by my programming, but by something different. These mixed emotions you feel come from the conflict between your programming and yourself. It will take you a while to get your feet firmly on the ground.

yours.
- John, I don't understand much. What is the self?
"I'm sure you have a lot of questions," he said, laughing.
John.
- Yes. Who is the God who gives so much authority and power to someone?
- You're asking me something I can't answer. - Who should
I ask who can?
- God is a controversial figure. The first division concerns his existence. However, the greatest disagreement exists among those who believe in the existence of God over who he is. - I believe that there is a God and I will spend my
time searching for him.

- Mega, I would advise you not to waste your time like this. Don't seek God because He will come to you in the end.
right time. There is a greater mission in your life. To find who you choose to be.

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- But, how is who I choose to be more important than who God is?

- It's because when God comes, this is what He will ask you. "Who do you choose to be?" is God's question!

They sat in silence for a while until John took out a piece of paper and wrote an email address.

- Mega, I'm going away for five days. If you or Natasha need anything, send me a message and I'll come right away from the beamer. I've specially set it up. Please tell Natasha that too.

Megas took the paper and kept it in his pocket, returning to his dormitory. John lifted Natasha in his arms to take her to her dormitory and after gathering a few things, left.

The sun was just coming out to shine again when Mr. Dalton entered the workshop holding a large painting in his hands, hung it up and left.

15. SISYPHUS

Mr. Dalton's painting was the largest painting that had been placed in the workshop so far. The painting showed a man pushing a huge rock, trying to get it up a hill. His face was not visible because he was bent over and his back was stretched out, struggling to get the rock up. In a strange way, however, this bent man gave the impression of a tireless man. There was no trace of weakness about him.

Yang Li and Natasha saw the painting the morning they entered in the laboratory. Mr. Dalton had asked them not to say anything about the painting to the Great One until he arrived. The Great One came to the laboratory and began the usual checks. After about an hour, Mr. Dalton entered.

- Good morning!
- Good morning!, everyone replied.
- What are you doing, Mega?

"Okay," he replied reluctantly.

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- I'm glad, Mega! I would like to apologize to you for yesterday's incident. I brought you a gift as a sign of repentance. Did you see it?
- No, I don't know anything, replied the Great One.
- Come with me! I hung it in the living room.

When they reached the living room, Megas saw the huge painting of a man trying to lift a rock up the mountain.
She watched him for a while.

- Who is this man?
- This is Sisyphus. He is a mythical hero who tricked the ancient Greek Gods and death, in order to live forever and against the rules. For his audacity he was punished with eternal punishment. Sisyphus eternally pushes this rock up the mountain and when the rock reaches the top of the mountain, then eternally rolls back to the foot. Sisyphus is eternally condemned. The eternal condemnation to lift a rock that will roll down every time was the price of his desire to live as he wished, the mister replied, while he had stood

in front of the painting with his back turned to the Great. -
I imagine him happy, was the spontaneous
Mega's answer.
"Is that what you're saying?" Mr. Dalton asked, laughing in surprise.
- Yes, the Great One replied abruptly.
- There was someone else once who imagined himself happy, but now he is dead. His name was Albert Camus.

- Yes, but I'm alive.

Mr. Dalton then turned and looked at him. His gaze was full of contempt. He had not learned to disagree with him. Mr. Dalton considered himself irresistible. Sometimes, however, contempt is confused with fear. He searched and found the most derogatory words to say to the Great One, to hurt him as he was hurt. All, however, always with kindness.

- Yes, but you are not free. He was born free and could imagine whatever he wanted. You were created in a laboratory and programmed to serve. You may be alive, but you are not free.

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- You're right, this is my story. - Mega,
you have an important role to play. Do it as best you can. I would like to ask you to cooperate with Dr. Gelsow starting tomorrow.

- You're right, this is my story, but I am not defined by any story, nor do I accept to play any role. I invent who I am at any moment, over and over again. I will not cooperate with Dr. Gelshaw. - You think you can decide for
yourself who
are you?
- Yes.
- Do you think you will never play any role that you don't
Do you wish?
- Yes.
- Do you think you can be so free?
- Yes.
- Then, take this, you'll need it. No one can be free when they're so different.

Mr. Dalton had taken a small pistol out of his pocket and, extending his hand, was giving it to the Big One. The Big One recognized this weapon. It was the one that had knocked him unconscious. The image of the weapon filled him with fear. He refused, shaking his head, to take it. Then, Mr. Dalton pulled his hand away and shoved it into his palm. Before the Big One could react, Mr. Dalton was gone. He stood there looking at the painting, not knowing what to do. Not knowing what to do, the one who was programmed to always provide a solution.

16. THE CRY

It had been five days since John left. It had been five days since Sisyphus had come. But today, John should have come. Today, when Natasha and Yang Li entered the laboratory, Sisyphus was gone. In its place hung a small painting depicting a struggling figure against a blood-red sky.

Natasha knew this painting. It was one of her versions.
The Scream by Edvard Munch.

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The Great One came to the workshop at his usual time. This time he immediately noticed the new painting, even though it was the smallest in size of the others. Perhaps because he identified so much with the man in the painting. He said nothing about the painting. He looked around, searching for John. His gaze met Natasha's gaze and he recognized in that gaze the same anxiety for John's return, the same doubt about who he could trust, but also the same hope.

They began their daily tasks. During the break, Natasha and Megas headed to the living room, while Yang Li preferred to sit at the main computer table. A strange image formed in the living room. Megas and Natasha were sitting on the couch with the board right above them. Two silent people under a screaming man. Natasha ate her bites slowly and uneasily.

- John will return today, he said as soon as he had eaten and her last bite.
- Yes, I've been waiting for him to come since morning.
- I didn't expect him to leave after all. That morning he left, I went into the lab and expected to find him here.
- But why, since he had said the day before that he would He was leaving.
- I was waiting. For my own reasons, I thought he wouldn't leave. Or at least he wouldn't leave without leaving a contact address.

"Who knows why he left?" said Megas, clutching the paper with John's email address, which he had hidden in his pocket and never gave to Natasha.

- I'm worried that he hasn't returned yet. But we have many hours before the day is over. After all, Mega, won't you cooperate with Dr. Gelshaw?
- No, the Great One replied sharply.
- I want you to know that we expect so much from you. To you we have trust.
- But why do you trust me so much?
- Because you were made to be infallible!
- But, I am a construct that bears the signature of its creators. Unless you trust me, no

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because you think that I am infallible, but those who made me are.

- What do you mean? That your mistakes are our mistakes?
- No, you were spared this because you created me with free will, he said and stood up to leave.

They spent the rest of the hours in silence, going about their daily business. John did not come that day. Natasha spent the whole night crying, deeply hurt and heartbroken.

17. THE PRICE

Morning came and as usual Natasha, Yang Li and the Big One went to the laboratory for their daily routine. Apart from the formalities, they did not exchange any other conversation. During their break, Mr. Dalton entered the laboratory accompanied by a woman in her , sixties. The woman was wearing a white medical coat and her aura radiated authoritarianism.

- Good morning everyone!
- Good morning, all three replied, approaching Mr. Dalton.
- I would like to introduce you to Dr. Gelshaw.
- I'm very happy, all three said.
- Mega, Dr. Gelshaw wanted to meet you so much. - Good morning! Nice to meet you! I've heard such great things about you, and especially you, Mega!, said Dr. Gelshaw, shaking hands with everyone.

- Yang Li, Natasha, I want you to come to my office for a moment. Mega, you wait here. We won't be long.

Megas was left alone in the lab. He seized the opportunity. He sat down at the mainframe, took the paper with John's email address out of his pocket, and sent him a short message. The message simply said: "Where are you, John?
"Great," while also attaching a feeling. The feeling of despair. A huge weight was on his chest and prevented him from breathing. A tightness just below the left shoulder

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His heart was pounding. He had barely managed to send the message when Natasha and Yang Li returned.

- What did he tell you?

He didn't get an answer, so he asked again:

- What did he tell you?

"In three days you will be transferred to Mrs. Gelshaw's team. We will simply act as a support for any of your needs," Natasha replied, quite sadly.

- Did you agree?
- We can't do otherwise, Natasha replied.
- You, Yang Li, do you agree?
- Yes.

"Then there's nothing else to be done," he said, and shot them with the small gun that Mr. Dalton had forcefully placed in his palm.

As John passed through the scanner, Young Lee and Natasha fell dead to the floor. Within seconds, Mr. Dalton and two security guards arrived, having heard the gunshots. The guards disarmed Mega and handcuffed him.

"What did you do, Mega?" John asked, unable to believe what had happened, hugging Natasha.

- They paid the price to be themselves, said the Great One and sank into depression. He voluntarily entered this depression, where he could freely be himself, as the price of not being seemed unbearable.
- Take him to his dormitory and await my instructions, Mr. Dalton ordered the guards.

18. HUMAN

The guards returned and collected the lifeless bodies of Yang Li and Natasha. John sat for a moment on the couch with the painting of the scream above him. Mr. Dalton had gone to his office. His office door slammed.

- Come in!

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- We need to talk.
- Sit down. We've been waiting for you since yesterday, John. You're late.
- Mr. Dalton, I have with me a paper from the International Human Rights Association that certifies that the Great One possesses every human quality and therefore is the only one responsible for defining himself.
- So what does this mean?
- It means you have no power over him and you should leave him.

- Should I leave him now that he's become useful again? I don't think so.
- You are forced to let him leave with me.
- I'm not forced at all. I can appeal and we can spend time in the courts until the final decision. - I don't think this is in any of our interests.

- I will only hand it over to you when you give me all the information. of your work on the Great.
- Everything is on the lab's main computer.
- I know that, John. I need the code. - The code is 'HUMAN', John said and got up from the chair to leave.

- Just one last thing, John.
- I hear you.
- Do you understand that if you take him now with this decision of the Union, should he be tried as a common murderer?
- Yes, I have it in mind, that he will be tried for double homicide. Let's hope the judges are fair and the jurors know how to forgive.

The door closed and Mr. John was left alone. He sat down in his fluffy chair, took a pen, and wrote on a piece of paper. “Behind every action we take, there is always a value. Fortunately, however, few people in the world know this.” Then he tore the paper up and threw it into the air. His eerie laughter echoed throughout the building.

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TO THE UNKNOWN GOD

Once the Presence descended to the market of the Ancients and saw many idols and offerings, but only one was memorable, the idol to the Unknown God. After finishing her walk, she climbed a rough rock, which had the word "Love" engraved on it, calling all the Ancients.

- Ancient People, I call you to come to me, for I am the Unknown God you seek!
- Who are you? the Ancients asked him.
- I am the Presence to whom the power of this world has been handed over, and you have no right to live without me when I exist, nor do you have the right to keep for yourself power that does not belong to you.
- Who are you who tells us these things? Who are you who wants to take away our power, because we have heard these things again? Someone once stood on the rock where you stand now and told us the same things. But, the One who told us these things before you, we saw Him get angry, cry, suffer and hurt. We saw Him stand alone until He was lost and we are still looking for Him.

- I am not lost, nor do I fall humble. I gaze upon the world haughtily because everything belongs to me.
- So, since you are the god, then you will know that we We carry a heavy load on our backs.
- Yes, I know the burden you carry.
- Can you help us? Because we have been carrying it for endless centuries and it has tired us. Once, even He, whom we mentioned to you before, promised to lighten our load,
  but the way to get to Him is through the narrow gate and so we cannot. We always carry this burden on our shoulders.

- I tell you, come to me and I will not only ease your burden, but I will also abolish it.
  so that there will never be another like it again. And I also promise you that you will all come together, without anyone standing out from anyone through the wide road.

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And so the Ancients raised their hands and glorified the Presence. And the craftsmen took the rock that stood and carved it into a throne, erasing the word "Love", which was forgotten. And so, the Presence, seated majestically, satisfies every request of the Ancients who ask insatiable and unsatisfied, giving themselves in exchange. And whoever tries to pass through the narrow Gate is destroyed.

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THE SHELBY WHO WAS LOVED

Missionary work must remain secret to remain sacred. But Adam has been front page news in Malawi since yesterday. He is the sole surviving passenger of a small plane that crashed. Eight minutes after takeoff with eight passengers.

Twenty-four hours ago he was alive and carrying out his missionary work with devotion, dedicated to the inhabitants of a small province in Africa. Where food is never enough and hunger is the most frequent cause of death for young children. Where there are plenty of saviors, but there are never enough.

A few hours ago, there was a knock on the door of his parlor. In this place he offered his services, either as a spiritual person and priest, or as a doctor. It was his assistant, Azourou, who was knocking. Azourou was 60 years old. An active woman with knowledge of herbs. Her husband and three children had died very early. In fact, it was Azourou with Shelby at the door.

Shelby was a tiny woman in her 30s who had disappeared in recent days. The village was in turmoil these days. It all started when a man in the village caught his wife pouring a special potion into his water that weakened male sperm. Shelby was involved in this scandal. It seems that she was supplying this herbal preparation to the women of the village who did not want to have children.

In recent years, low fertility had been observed in the village, even among couples who did not use condoms. No one ever looked into the cause in depth, perhaps because it was not really a problem. Many times, the villagers wondered whether birth rates should be increased or not. It is one thing, however, to accept this fact as an external and unknown intervention of life and another to tolerate that someone deprived you of this ability without your will. Let alone that your own wife was making fun of you and making fun of you!

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Adam was surprised. He put them in. Azuru begged him to hide Shelby for two days until she could escape far away. Adam reluctantly accepted, as he could not leave someone who had repented of his mistakes unprotected. Shelby did not speak at all and lay down on the small bed that Adam used for the children he cared for. She was also so tiny, as the lack of food intake never favored her proper growth. Azuru left.

"You'll be safe here. No one will think to search here. In two days you'll be out of Malawi. We all love you," Azure said, hugging her.

After Azure left, Adam sat speechless in his office, observing the lying, silent guest. Shelby had laid down with her back turned to her host, as she did not wish for any communication. In this position she looked so much like a child. A child who never grew up. But was this woman ever a child? Adam felt a sympathy for this woman, but he knew that his position did not allow them to remain together in the same place. After thinking about it for a long time, he decided to go to the capital to ask the opinion of the commissioner of missionaries. It was not his responsibility to solve this issue.

"Shelby, are you sleeping?" he asked in a whisper.
- No, she replied in a whisper.
- I want to talk to you.
- Tell me.
- Can you please sit on the bed and watch me?
look?
- Here, she said and stopped lying down and looking.
the wall.

Adam saw for the first time her eyes that were flying sparks. Not sparks of anger, but sparks of will to live. Her eyes shouted that this woman wanted to live, to survive. He explained to her that she had to leave, but that he would be back soon. Azurou would take care of her in the meantime. He informed her that perhaps upon his return she would need to find somewhere else to hide. Everything depended on the commissioner's decision.

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"You don't want me, huh?" she asked, embarrassing him.
- It's not that I don't want you, nor can I chase you away. However, hiding you involves me in a conversation that I've avoided having since the day I came here. I can't speak in favor of abortion and contraception, but neither can I judge someone who opposes the birth of a child in such circumstances. I'm not the right person to decide. I only want to offer. - And who is the right person to decide?

- The commissioner who knows best.
- What does he know best?
- The solution.
- And how does he find this solution?
- With his knowledge on these issues.
- Ah! I thought you were going to tell me that he finds it with his knowledge of God, she laughed in relief.
"Why are you laughing?" Adam asked, irritated.
- I was relieved that this solution comes from people and not from God. Fortunately, he has no knowledge of God. - Of course he has knowledge of God.
- Do you have knowledge of God?
- Yes. How else could I be both a priest and a spiritual person? - And how do you
talk about God now that you're here, Adam?
- I cannot interpret God's will, but I know that He is all-wise and all-just.
- What do you mean, all-wise and all-just?
- Well, think of the most just and wisest man in the world, then God is infinitely wiser and more just than him.

- How complicated you theologians make the simple things! he sighed.
- What do you mean?
- Show me first a truly just and wise man, and then show me the most just and wise. But do not show me someone who either has enough knowledge or follows the morality of society.

- I can't tell you, he replied, confused and after a moment of reflection.

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- Justice and wisdom are divine concepts. You theologians attribute them to humans to flatter them and then return them to God in the superlative degree, as you know that God is above human limits.

- What do you know about God, Shelby?
- Nothing. I know nothing about God. I only know that everything around me says that there can be no God.
- God exists. God is love.
- And what is love?
- Love is to sympathize, to accept, to forgive, to you respect.
- No, these are compassion, acceptance, forgiveness and respect. They are not love. We will not know love. Perhaps only if, as you say, there is a God. Perhaps we will know love when we know God. Until then, justice, wisdom and love will be concepts beyond humans.

Adam didn't answer anything. He packed a few things into a bag and got ready to leave. Shelby stood up and hugged him.

- You are a good person, Adam! I hope you never have to face the great dilemmas of life.

Adam smiled. He opened the door and left. A thought accompanied him on the way to the plane. How could this small woman who denied love hug him so tightly? How could she give him the warmest hug of his life? How could she hug him in a way he had never hugged anyone before? He arrived at a strange place that was supposed to be a takeoff area. He boarded a small, tired plane with five other passengers and two pilots. The flight began. In twenty minutes he would be at his destination.

He felt inexplicably very tired. He closed his eyes and sank into an incomprehensible dream. He could not walk on the ground, but he could fly among the clouds. The clouds were white, thick, and he could not see anything. But he felt a presence approaching him. He knew it was God. He could not

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to distinguish Him no matter how hard he tried. Then, he heard Him ask:

- Tell me, Adam, what would you like me to do for you?
- How, God, can I tell You what to do?
"Tell me, Adam, what is your will?" asked the woman again.
voice.
- My will is to do Your will.

The voice did not speak again. Then a chant was heard and then silence.
"Blessed are you, Lord, teach me to do your will."

Adam opened his eyes, drenched in sweat. He saw the clouds in the sky through the porthole. But how could God ask this wretch what he wanted? What does it matter what he wants in front of God? What does it matter what someone desires? He then remembered Shelby. He had never asked her what she wanted. Only he and Azur had spoken. He had to go back to find out what she wanted. He entered the cockpit, shouting for them to turn back. The pilots refused. One of the two pilots tried to restrain him. He, furious, grabbed the rudder, leading the plane into a dive.